



Testimony of
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And the
Subcommittee on Immigration,
Border Security and Claims

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairmen, Ranking Members, and Members of the Subcommittees. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the FBI's efforts to combat recent violence along the South Texas border with Mexico. The region between the Texas cities of Del Rio and Brownsville has experienced high levels of drug-related turmoil since 2003. The focal point of much of this activity is Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, a border city situated directly across the Rio Grande River from Laredo, Texas. Drug traffickers have exacted an especially bloody toll in Nuevo Laredo and neighboring Mexican towns. Significant levels of violence and drug-related criminal activity also plague Laredo. As you know, this bloody drama revolves around the Gulf Cartel drug trafficking organization which dominates the region and commands smuggling operations along this stretch of the American southwest. One of their enforcement groups, known as Los Zetas bears primary responsibility for the violence. They have been fighting a turf war on behalf of the Gulf Cartel against rival drug trafficking organizations. Because the

Bureau focuses on large-scale enterprise investigations which target the command and control structures of criminal groups, we are well suited to help dismantle these trafficking organizations.

KIDNAPPINGS

One of the most significant ramifications of the unrest along the border has been a string of kidnappings involving US citizens. Between May 2004 and May 2005, there have been 35 reported abductions of US citizens in this region.¹ Thirty-four of these abductions occurred in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and involved US citizens who had crossed the border. Twenty-three victims were released by their captors, nine victims remain missing, and two are confirmed dead. These numbers likely represent only a fraction of the actual occurrences, because many kidnappings of US citizens go unreported. There are two reasons for the underreporting of abductions along the border. First, victims and their families fear reprisal from kidnappers. Second, since many victims are alleged to be involved in drug trafficking, they and their families are reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement. The San Antonio Division has 26 pending kidnapping cases. We have offered all available resources to assist Mexican law enforcement and have followed every domestic lead to locate the US kidnapping victims.

The Laredo Resident Agency received complaints from the families of US citizens Janet Yvette Martinez and Brenda Yadira Cisneros after they disappeared on September 17, 2004 in Nuevo Laredo. They remain missing. Investigation revealed that alleged members of Los Zetas kidnapped Martinez and Cisneros. Mexican authorities have cooperated and we are working with them to review evidence in this case.

¹ Much larger numbers of Mexican citizens have been abducted along the border. From January to mid August 2005, 202 kidnappings occurred in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, the Gulf Cartel's operational center which includes the cities of Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, and Reynosa.

The FBI has interviewed all cooperative kidnapping victims subsequent to their release. In cases where the victim remains missing, we have tried to obtain DNA samples to identify any human remains, if recovered. In the one case where the kidnapping occurred within the United States (Laredo), the FBI helped rescue the victim before he was transported to Mexico. This investigation is pending and the Assistant United States Attorneys in Laredo and Houston are pursuing charges.

INVESTIGATIONS TARGETING CARTEL ACTIVITY

The San Antonio Division has over 50 Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigations. These target Mexican drug trafficking organizations and related activities including money laundering and gang violence. One of the investigations, Operation Cazadores, led to the indictment of Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cardenas-Guillen. The investigation continues to pursue fugitive Gulf Cartel leaders indicted along with Cardenas-Guillen. Other pending investigations in Laredo, Houston, and Dallas, Texas focus on the leadership of organizations affiliated with Cardenas-Guillen.

GANG ACTIVITY

Mexican drug cartels responsible for recent border violence have also cemented ties to street and prison gangs on the US side. US gangs retail drugs purchased from Mexican traffickers and often work as cartel surrogates or enforcers on US soil. Intelligence suggests Los Zetas have hired members of various gangs at different times including the Mexican Mafia, Texas Syndicate, MS-13, and Hermanos Pistoleros Latinos

to further their criminal endeavors. The FBI is well-equipped to deal with these groups. The Bureau, in conjunction with our law enforcement partners has established a National Gang Intelligence Center at FBI Headquarters. In addition, we have established task forces throughout the country to disrupt gang activity. The FBI's San Antonio Division currently operates two Safe Street/Gang task forces addressing border violence in San Antonio, and the Rio Grand Valley. These FBI-led task forces include FBI Special Agents, other Federal Agents and local law enforcement officers.

- The San Antonio Safe Streets/Gang Task Force is comprised of nine FBI Special Agents and 13 task force officers.
- The Rio Grande Valley Safe Streets/Gang Task Force is comprised of eight FBI Special Agents and five task force officers.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The FBI continues to collect and share intelligence with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Through Safe Streets task forces, we are collecting intelligence and exploring the connections between Mexican cartels and gangs along the border. We are participating in Operation Blackjack, an interagency endeavor in conjunction with Mexican authorities. Through this program we have exchanged vital targeting intelligence on Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel with our law enforcement colleagues including DEA, ATF, and appropriate elements of DHS. More broadly, at the core of our intelligence-gathering effort lies the FBI's McAllen Intelligence Center. The MIC, as it is commonly known, is comprised of representatives from various local, state, and federal agencies in Texas. This is the central repository for border violence-related intelligence. The MIC collects and analyzes criminal intelligence from state, local, and

federal investigations along the Texas/Mexico border. The center routinely shares intelligence with Mexican officials and over 300 law enforcement agencies in South Texas. This includes material regarding corrupt Mexican officials, gang activity along the border, and drug trafficking. The McAllen Intelligence Center also maintains a comprehensive database of Zetas, their associates, and members of both the Gulf Cartel and its rivals.

We have had several operational successes based on intelligence we have gathered and passed on to Mexican officials. Some of the information the FBI provided to Mexican officials helped Mexican federal and military authorities locate two Zeta safe houses in Nuevo Laredo in June 2005 where they rescued 44 kidnapping victims. FBI officials recently met with their Mexican counterparts and discussed the location of several suspected Zeta-owned ranches. Based on information furnished by the FBI, Mexican authorities conducted surveillance of the locations and provided us with the resulting intelligence.

Eight FBI Special Agents in our Resolution 6 program cover five major cities in Mexico working in DEA offices which affords complete coordination with DEA resources and investigations. These agents develop intelligence regarding the activities of Mexican criminal enterprises to support US investigations. All of this work is coordinated with representatives from key DEA offices and Mexican officials. Recently Mexican authorities used FBI Resolution 6 intelligence to conduct several drug seizures including seven tons of marijuana attributed to Joaquin Guzman-Loera, arch rival of the Gulf Cartel. In September 2005, FBI Headquarters deployed analytical resources to Monterrey, Mexico, to provide case support.

The FBI continues to aggressively pursue the major organizations and violent criminals responsible for lawlessness along the border. The FBI along with our colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State are working with the Mexican Attorney General's Office and the US Consulate in Monterrey to identify Los Zetas members and their associates in order to revoke their immigration documents. This measure will make it more difficult for them to enter and operate in the United States. We are also cooperating with other US law enforcement agencies in investigations targeting Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel and their enemies.

On October 13, 2005 the Attorney General announced the creation of an ATF-led Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) in Laredo, Texas. In combination with the VCITs already established in Los Angeles, Tucson, Albuquerque and Houston, the Laredo VCIT will address cross-border violence. The VCIT model combines local police resources with ATF investigative and technical expertise and the resources of ICE, CBP, and other federal law enforcement partners to reduce the violence that plagues our most crime-ridden communities. We look forward to working with our colleagues from ATF in combating gang violence and other violent crime along the border with Mexico.

The FBI is taking pro-active measures to assess and confront this heightened threat to public safety on both sides of the US/Mexico border, including participation in multiple bi-lateral multi-agency meetings and working groups to hone strategies to address the problem. Our intelligence gathering activities provide windows into these organizations and their operations while our investigative efforts strive to disrupt and dismantle these criminal organizations and reduce the violence in the region.

Para-military groups such as the Zetas, Los Negros, Los Numeros, and others who work for Mexican drug cartels as enforcers are a serious threat to public safety on both sides of the entire U.S./Mexico border. They are well financed and well equipped. Their willingness to shoot and kill law enforcement officers on both sides of the border make these para-military groups among the most dangerous criminal enterprises in North America. Working with our federal, state, and local partners, and the Government of Mexico, the FBI continues to investigate these cartels and their para-military enforcers, gathering evidence for prosecution where U.S. jurisdiction exists.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I would be happy to answer any questions.